

## Early New England Homes Studied by BSC Students

BRIDGEWATER — Got an old home that you think might have built in the 17th or 18 Century, but you're not quite sure? Or do you have some piece of furniture that looks like it could be a valuable antique, and yet you really can't tell?

Well, at Bridgewater State College this summer there is a course offered for people who have such questions, or who just enjoy learning about the Arts and Architecture of Early New England, which is in fact the name of the class.

And this is an even more unusual course in that it didn't meet at the college at all. The students went right to the sources themselves, early New England homes.

"This is certainly one of the most popular and talked about courses we've offered this summer," reports Prof. John W. Jones, associate director of the College's Division of Continuing Education, which offered over 150 courses, special programs, and workshops this summer to a student population that ranged in age and occupation from regular college undergraduates to housewives, other working adults and senior citizens.

Arts and Architecture of Early New England, under the instruction of Professor William Kendall, assistant professor of Art at Bridgewater and an expert in the architecture of older homes, enrolled 25 students for the two-week course. During that time the group visited nine locations, including a number of famous homes in the Plymouth and Duxbury area, as well as sites as far away as Andover, Concord and Sturbridge.

"We designed the course to cover the evolution of style and structure of New England homes from the 17th Century through the early 19th Century. We also studied the interiors of the homes, the furniture and decorative objects such as paintings, textiles, floor coverings and folk art," explains Prof. Kendall.

Prof. Kendall is well-qualified to teach this subject. He and his wife, Jeanne, who is a student of antiques herself and assisted him with the course, live in an early 18th Century New England home and have long had an avid interest in early arts and architecture. Prof. Kendall once purchased a 17th Century structure and took it apart, piece by piece, studying and labeling as he went along, to get a better understanding of its construction. That house has now been rebuilt and stands in Connecticut.

During the course the students received broad and comprehensive instruction on everything from the history of New England homes to dating techniques and furniture identification methods. Prof. Kendall provided some information that he had shared with his students on estimating the age of homes:

"One of the quickest clues of course is the frame of the house," he advises, "and it's one of the first things I look at. A 17th Century or early 18th Century home often has a large beam running across the ceiling, and this is called a 'summer beam.' Another indication as to the age of the house is the fireplace. The older homes will have a large fireplace with the bake oven in the back wall, which indicates a home probably older than 1750. After that time the fireplace became smaller and the bake oven is in the sidewall, where it was easier to cook food. There are, of course, a number of other more sophisticated techniques we employ in dating homes," he said.

The class saw one of those techniques when they visited the Old Abbott House in Andover, owned by Frank Demers who is a member of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities and a personal friend of Prof. Kendall. Demers is also an expert in dating older homes, and he presented one highly accurate method which involves counting the rings on the wooden beams of a home and by analysis of weather charts and old records estimating the age.

"This has been proven accurate to within two or three years of the original date of construction," says Prof. Kendall.

How does Prof. Kendall compare the craftsmanship and care that went into the building of these older homes with the techniques employed today? "The comparison is a difficult one because today economy dictates how a home will be built, and there is an emphasis to get a house up as quickly and cheaply as possible. The cost of supplies and labor would make the building of homes designed on the older principles prohibitive. Unfortunately, too, there doesn't seem to be much imagination in the design of modern housing either," he replies.

There is a problem for people interested in early New England architecture who search for specimens in this area: There just are not as many 17th Century homes in Southeastern Massachusetts as there are in other localities.



BSC Prof. William Kendall, left, explains methods of construction in bygone days during a field session of the Arts and Architecture of Early New England class. The group is shown visiting the John Alden Home in Duxbury.